

## The “BETWEEN”

**“between”**: The “between” is Martin Buber’s term for the meeting place in which mutual relations happen in a genuine encounter between two human beings. It is a dimension that is neither solely within the two individuals nor in the social world, but somewhere in the middle, “a dimension which is accessible only to them both.” This locus of the unfolding of the dialogical relationship is also known as the “interhuman” or metaphorically as the “narrow ridge,” where the I and Thou meet. (1955, p. 202-5)

### Discussion:

Buber considered himself a philosophical anthropologist, exploring the question “What is man?” Like the original Gestalt psychologists, his concern was with the wholeness of man, as opposed to man as the object of scientific observation or abstraction, or man reduced to a sum of his parts. (Friedman, Introduction to Buber, 1965, p. 20). He insisted that the knowing of man as a subject, with a unique personal inner experience and perspective on the world, can only happen when two personal existences meet and participate in the dialogical relationship of the “between.” This philosophy underlies Gestalt’s use of the dialogic relationship in therapy. This existential or “interhuman” relationship is in contrast to classical psychoanalysts’ use of transference and the blank screen in the therapeutic relationship.

### Illustrative Quotations:

• **Buber**: “The fundamental fact of human existence is neither the individual as such nor the aggregate as such. Each, considered by itself, is a mighty abstraction. The individual is a fact of existence in so far as he steps into a living relation with other individuals. The aggregate is a fact of existence in so far as it is built up of living units of relation. The fundamental fact of human existence is man with man. What is peculiarly characteristic of the human world is above all that something takes place between one being and another the like of which can be found nowhere in nature. ...It is rooted in one being turning to another as another, as this particular other being, in order to communicate with it in a sphere that is common to them but reaches out beyond the special sphere of each. I call this sphere, ...the sphere of “between”.

“ ‘Between’ ...[is] the real place and bearer of what happens between men; it has received no specific attention because, in distinction from the individual soul and its context, it does not exhibit a smooth continuity, but is ever and again re-constituted in accordance with men’s meetings with one other.”

“In the most powerful moments of dialogic, where in truth ‘deep calls unto deep’, it becomes unmistakably clear that it is not the wand of the individual or of the social, but of a third which draws the circle round the happening. On the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the **narrow ridge**, where the *I* and *Thou* meet, there is the realm of the ‘between’ ”. (1955, 203-204)

• **Buber**: Healing through meeting: “...in the immediacy of one human being standing over against another, the encapsulation must and can be broken through, and a transformed, healed relationship must and can be opened to the person who is sick in his relationship to otherness – to the worlds of the other, which he cannot remove into his soul. A soul is never sick alone, but always a between-ness also, a situation between it and another human being. (1951, in 1957/1990, 97)

• **Buber**: “What humanity is can be properly grasped only in vital reciprocity.” (1965, 84)

• **Yontef**: “A commitment to dialogue...specifically means allowing the outcome to be determined by The Between and not controlled by either individual.” “...good therapy

requires...surrendering to that which happens between the therapist and the patient...a surrender to what develops and emerges out of the interaction.” (1993b, 220, 273)

• **Hycner and Jacobs:** “the heart of this approach is the belief that the ultimate basis of our existence is relational or dialogic in nature: We are all threads in the interhuman fabric.”

“The unit of existence, and experience, is the self-with-other-and-other-with-self. This is the ‘between.’ Buber views the person’s being-with as always oscillating between separateness and relatedness. The relatedness is an *inherent* part of our being, not a later add on.” (1995, 6, 116-7)

• **Staemmler:** “The ‘between’ in which understanding takes place is a *whole*, which...is *more* and *different* from the sum of its parts. It is not just what the one person contributes plus what the other person contributes; it consists of what results from the mutual exchange within this encounter, and this result would never have been possible for each of the participants alone nor by means of what they brought into that encounter in the first place.” (IGJ, 2006, 29/2, 29)

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Stephanie Sabar, MSW, LCSW  
[www.stephaniesabar.com](http://www.stephaniesabar.com)